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ABSTRACT

The document is a student manual, which presents a learning module on literary analysis of children's stories, and is concerned with the ability to distinguish and identify theme, plot, and characterization. A concomittant purpose is to familiarize teachers with a number of classic children's stories in which theme, plot, and characterization are successfully structured. The module consists of a pre-assessment, four element/activity groupings, a post-assessment, appendices, and bibliography. Instructor's Guide is published separately. (MB)

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TOWARD COMPETENCE

INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

COMPETENCY BASED TEACHER EDUCATION PROJECT
THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
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LITERARY ANALYSIS OF CHILDREN'S STORIES

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RICHMOND COLLEGE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

What Is Competency Based Teacher Education? 1

Overview 5

Prerequisites 7

How to Take This Module 8

Pre-Assessment 13

Element I 17

Element II 25

Element III 36

Element IV 46

Post Assessment 50

Appendix 55

Bibliography of Children's Stories 65

References 67

WHAT IS COMPETENCY-BASED TEACHER EDUCATION?

The set of materials you are about to begin using represents a new direction in teacher education. Called competency-based teacher education, this approach to training teachers emphasizes the teacher's performance--what he or she is actually able to do as the result of acquiring certain knowledge or skills.

Performance in a specific area is referred to as a competency. Thus, what we expect the teacher to be like after completing his education can be described in terms of the competencies he should have. The emphasis is on doing rather than on knowing, though performance is frequently the result of knowledge.

This shift in emphasis from knowing to doing accounts, to a great extent, for the differences you will notice in the format and content of these materials. To begin with, the set of materials itself is called a module because it is thought of as one part of an entire system of instruction. The focus has been narrowed to one competency or to a small group of closely related competencies. The ultimate aim of the module is expressed as a terminal objective, a statement describing what you, the teacher, should be able to do as a result of successfully completing this module.

Your final performance, however, can usually be broken down into a series of smaller, more specific objectives. As you achieve each of these, you are taking a step toward fulfilling the ultimate goal of the module. Each intermediate objective is the focus of a group of activities designed to enable you to reach that objective.

Together, the activities that make up each element, or part, of the module enable you to achieve the terminal objective.

There are several kinds of objectives, depending on what kind of performance is being demanded of you. For example, in a cognitive-based objective, the emphasis is on what you know. But since these are behavioral objectives, what you know can only be determined overtly. An objective can only be stated in terms of your behavior--what you can do. You might, for instance, be asked to demonstrate your knowledge of a subject by performing certain tasks, such as correctly completing arithmetic problems or matching words and definitions. In addition to cognitive-based objectives, there are performance-based objectives, where the criterion is your actual skill in carrying out a task; consequence-based objectives, for which your success in teaching something to someone else is measured; and exploratory objectives, which are open-ended, inviting you to investigate certain questions in an unstructured way.

Along with the assumption that the competencies, or behaviors, that make for successful teaching can be identified goes the assumption that these competencies can be assessed in some way. In fact, the statement of objectives and the development of assessment procedures form the main thrust of competency-based teacher education. The module, and the activities it contains or prescribes, is just a way of implementing the objectives.

But the module does have certain advantages as an instructional tool. For one thing, it enables you to work on your own and at your own pace. The activities are usually varied so that you can

select those which are best suited to your learning style. And the module enables you to cover certain subject areas with maximum efficiency; since if you pass the pre-assessment for a given objective, you are exempted from the module implementing that objective. What matters is not the amount of classroom time you put in on a subject but your ability to demonstrate certain competencies, or behaviors.

OVERVIEW

Let us suppose that you have read a story, enjoyed it, and believe it is good enough to recommend to your friends. When they ask you why you liked it, you reply, "It was rewarding -- I learned something about myself from it." Your friends then read the story and agree that it is good. One of them later tells you, "I liked the story -- especially the main character. I really admired her strength." Your second friend reports that "it was a good story because it had plenty of action -- you never knew what was going to happen next." A third friend read and enjoyed the story, but couldn't explain why. Although all four of you agreed that the story was "good," it appealed to you in different ways -- or in the case of your third friend, for no reason that could be explained.

Now, let's suppose that you and a group of friends are discussing another story. Some of you say that it is a "bad" story and others that it simply isn't good enough. One person says she felt emotional about one of the characters, but does not think the story "ended right." Another person thinks that the story just didn't hold his interest because there were no interesting characters. You decide that the story, in comparison with similar stories you have read, just did not move fast enough. Another friend feels that the story never got off or that it promised more than it delivered. She says the story did not come together satisfactorily -- that the pieces just didn't fit. Another friend reports that while he liked some parts of the story,

he felt that it "hit" too hard. But you disagree -- you say that the story didn't say anything new and in fact, didn't say anything at all. Your third friend, from the first reading group, also says the book was "bad," but again can't support his opinion.

In both groups all but one of you had different reactions to the same story and you supported your opinions. You could tell why you thought the story was good or bad -- or why you liked or disliked the story. The person who agreed, but could not support his opinion why one book was good and another bad, might believe he did not even understand the story. He doesn't know whether the author has failed to write clearly or if he just lacks the perceptions or reading skills necessary to support his views.

How do you form a basis for judging whether a story is good or bad? Do you know exactly why you prefer one kind of story over another? Why would you recommend a particular book to other people and how would you describe it to them? Are you able to select other books of equal value and interest to read and recommend? Have you read enough good stories to be able to make these kinds of decisions about an unfamiliar story?

For the child who is just beginning to learn to read, the teacher emphasizes phonics and decoding. As the child progresses from words to phrases and from phrases to sentences, the teacher emphasizes comprehension. Although the goal is sometimes lost or miscarried due to these emphases on reading mechanics, the teacher's ultimate aim is to help the child develop an appreciation for storytelling. Knowing just how to generate this interest in reading

or hearing stories depends to a large extent on the knowledge and skills of the teacher involved.

This module is concerned with a basic skill necessary to the development of sound literary judgment -- the ability to identify and distinguish three underlying story structures: theme, plot, and characterization. This skill is important for two reasons. Because the teacher is primarily responsible for selecting reading materials for pupils, he or she should be able to know what stories are appropriate, valuable and interesting to individuals or groups of pupils. The teacher must be able to determine the kinds of stories which have appeal or relevance to pupils with different interests and backgrounds. Secondly, this skill will enable teachers to interpret the stories pupils are reading in such a way that the pupils will themselves begin to develop a sound basis for analysis. A child's ability to support and defend opinions about stories and to indicate to the teacher the kinds of stories he or she is interested in may well determine whether that child will like to read and will continue to read outside the classroom.

The comcommitant purpose of this module is to familiarize teachers with a number of classic children's stories in which the themes, plots, and characterizations are successfully structured, as well as appealing.

Prerequisites

This module has been designed for use in training programs for in-service teachers who will be working in kindergartens,

elementary schools, or schools for special children. You may be taking this module as part of either a children's literature course or a reading and language arts course.

However, you do not need to be enrolled in a teacher training program in order to take this module. Parents, practicing teachers, paraprofessionals, assistants in daycare centers, librarians -- anyone who is responsible for selecting reading materials for children-- will benefit from the information and experiences which this module provides.

How To Take This Module

Now that you have read the overview and prerequisites, you can decide whether or not you want to go ahead with this module. Before you make your decision, you may first want to get an estimate of the amount of time you will need to spend. Listed in the Bibliography of Children's Stories on pages 65-[illegible] of the Appendix are 36 stories which you will need to read or already be familiar with. Look over this list. If you have already read most of these stories, your work on this module will probably take no more than eight hours. Allow yourself additional time if you will have to read most of them for the first time. Many of the stories are short and most of them are available on audio cassettes, filmstrips, and recordings.

If you decide that you would like to enter this module, you will follow three basic steps: take a pre-assessment test, complete the activities in four instructional elements, and take a post-assessment test.

The pre-assessment for this module consists of 20 items for which you will identify either the theme, plot or c[illegible]terization. For Part D, you will need to read for the first time or re-familiarize yourself with five children's stories before completing the items. The purpose of the pre-assessment is to test your present skill in identifying literary structures. If after reading through the test you feel you will not be able to score at least 80% (that is, answer correctly at least 16 items), you can save time by asking your instructor to allow you to start directly on Element I.

There are two good reasons for taking the pre-assessment. A score of at least 80% indicates that you have met the criterion for this module and may exit after the test. You will have demonstrated that you already possess the skill which is the terminal objective of this module and do not need the activities in the instructional elements.

After evaluating your test, your instructor may determine that you possess one or two, but not all of the skills stated in the terminal objective. In the event that your instructor is using the pre-assessment for diagnostic purposes, you will be informed. You will then work only on those activities which involve the skill(s) the test indicates you need practice in.

Lack of success on the pre-assessment should not discourage you. It is simply an indication that you will benefit from the information and activities which this module provides.

This module consists of four instructional elements. Each element has its own objective, and together these objectives make up the terminal objective for this module:

> You will be able to identify the plot, theme, and characterization in each of the stories listed in the Bibliography of Children's Stories on pages 65-66 of the Appendix to meet a criterion level of 80%.

Each of the first three elements in this module deals with a different literary structure -- either theme, plot, or characterization. In each of these elements, you will be reading short articles which discuss these concepts. Then you will read five stories for which you will identify the literary structure under discussion. In the self-assessments at the end of the first three elements, you will describe in a brief statement that structure in each of the five stories you read.

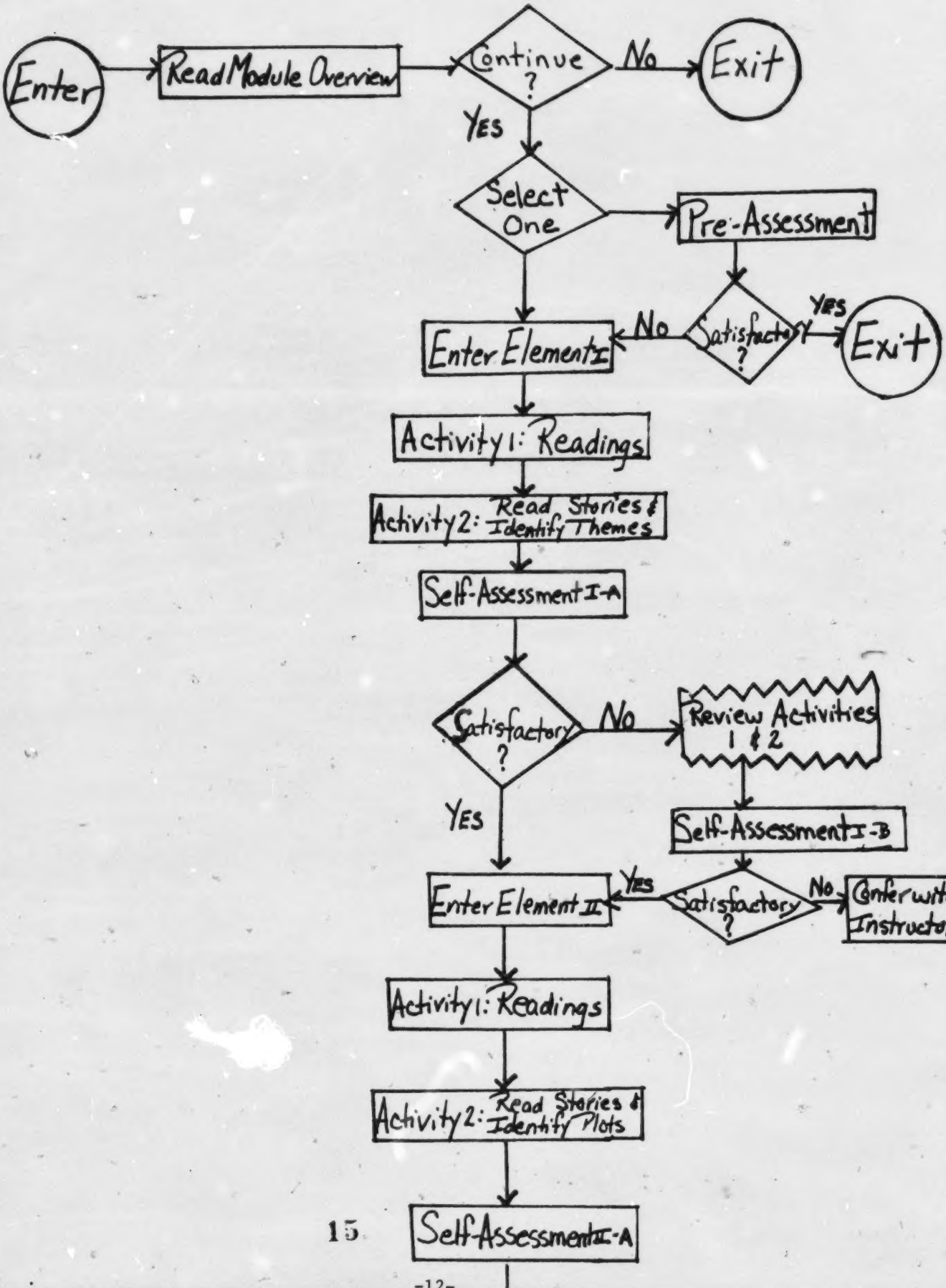
In Element IV, the single activity consists of reading five stories and identifying and describing all three structures in each story.

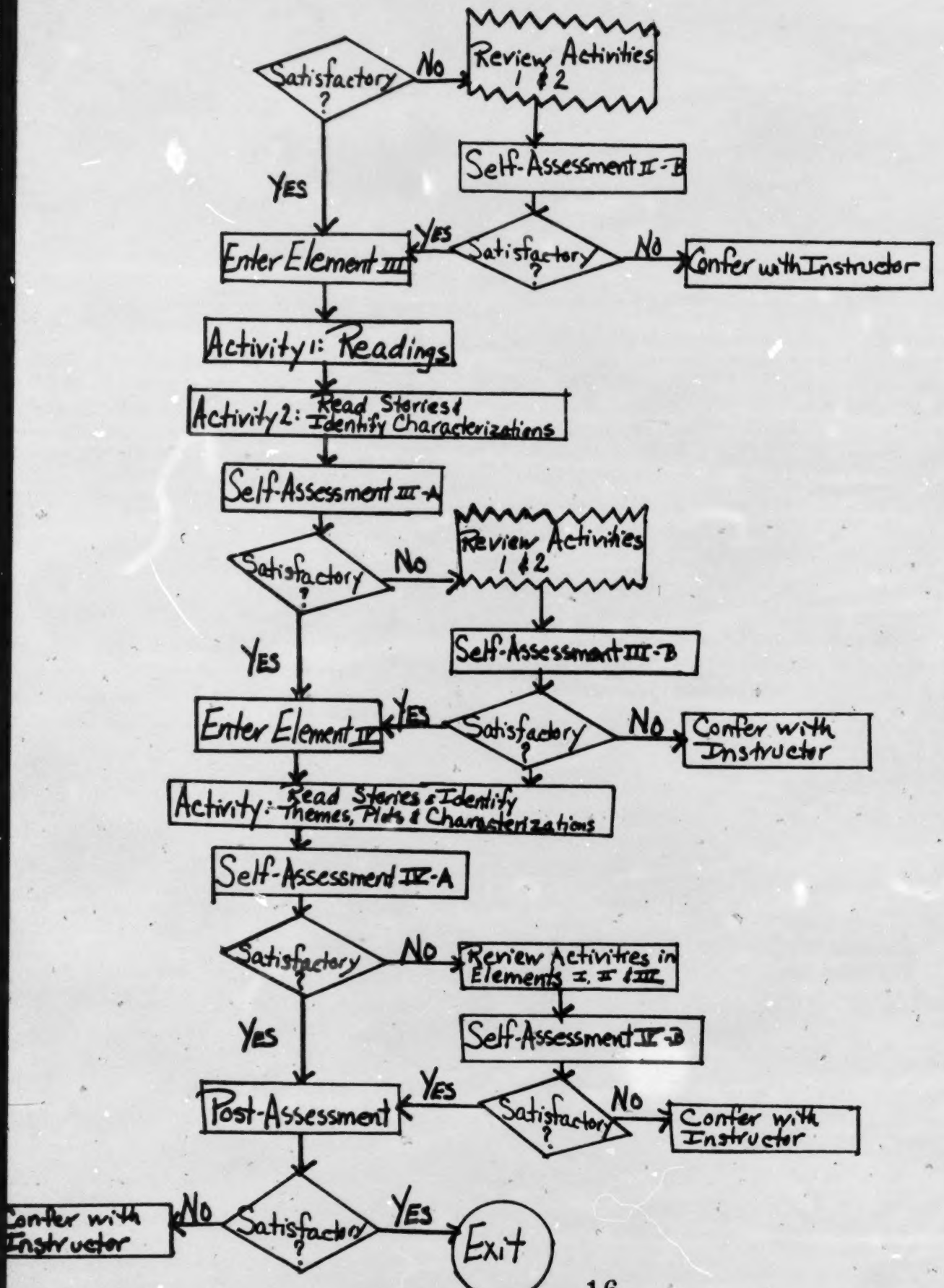
In order for you to assess your work in each of the elements, you will need to consult with one or more of your peers who have completed this module or who are taking it along with you. You and a small group of peers may want to meet in a seminar-type situation to discuss your statements and decide whether you have met the criteria for the self-assessments. If you are the only person in your program working on this module, then you will need to meet with your instructor who will help you evaluate your answers.

At the end of Element IV, there is a post-assessment in which you will read ten stories, and then identify and describe the strongest or most essential literary structure in each one. Your instructor will evaluate your performance and together you will decide whether you have successfully met the assessment standard for this module. A score of at least 80% will indicate that you possess the skill that is the terminal objective for this module, and you may exit.

If you do not meet this criterion, your instructor may advise you to re-enter the module, or provide you with an alternate procedure.

The flow chart, which appears on page 12 outlines in graphic form the steps you must follow in going through this module. If you have decided that you want to take this module, turn to page 13 which gives the directions for the pre-assessment.


Enter
Read Module Overview
Continue ?
No
Exit
Yes
Select One
Pre-Assessment
Satisfactory ?
Yes
Exit
No
Enter Element I
Activity 1: Readings
Activity 2: Read Stories & Identify Themes
Self-Assessment I-A
Satisfactory ?
No
Review Activities 1 & 2
Yes
Self-Assessment I-B
Satisfactory ?
Yes
No
Confer with Instructor
Enter Element II
Activity 1: Readings
Activity 2: Read Stories & Identify Plots
Self-Assessment II-A


Satisfactory ?
No
Review Activities 1 & 2
Self-Assessment II-B
YES
Enter Element III
YES
Satisfactory ?
No
Confer with Instructor
Activity 1: Readings
Activity 2: Read Stories & Identify Characterizations
Self-Assessment III-A
Satisfactory ?
No
Review Activities 1 & 2
YES
Self-Assessment III-B
Enter Element IV
YES
Satisfactory ?
No
Confer with Instructor
Activity: Read Stories & Identify Themes, Plots & Characterizations
Self-Assessment IV-A
Satisfactory ?
No
Review Activities in Elements I, II & III
YES
Self-Assessment IV-B
Post-Assessment
YES
Satisfactory ?
No
Confer with Instructor
Satisfactory ?
No
Confer with Instructor
YES
Exit

PRE-ASSESSMENT

The following pre-assessment exercise will serve as a guide to what you know about literary analysis of children's stories. It will also indicate the areas in which you will need to improve or develop the skill which is the terminal objective for this module. Complete as many of the items as you can. However, if at any point you feel that you are simply guessing or that you do not have the knowledge or skill needed to accurately complete a particular item, indicate this in the space provided for the answer. You must score at least 80% on this test in order to exit, without taking this module. If, after reading through the pre-assessment, you feel that you cannot achieve the criterion level of 80%, you should inform your instructor, who will decide whether you should skip the pre-assessment and start working immediately on Element I.

The pre-assessment is also for diagnostic purposes. Your instructor may feel that you have some of the knowledges and skills--for example, you may be able to identify "plots" in children's stories, but not "themes," or "characterizations." In evaluating your pre-assessment test, you and your instructor may decide that you should work only on those elements which involve those particular structures.

Therefore, carefully make your decision about whether to take the Pre-Assessment -- and good luck!

PRE-ASSESSMENT

A. Place a "T" in the blank beside each sentence which states a theme. Place an "F" in the blank, if the statement does not express a theme.

_____1. A conflict with a parent may cause a child to have a nightmare.

_____2. This is the story of the three little kittens.

_____3. Experiencing and living with nature can be a great wonder.

_____4. Little Red Riding Hood went off to visit her grandmother.

_____5. People will reward those who work hard.

B. Underline the sentences which are descriptions of plot and draw circles around those which are not descriptions of plots.

1. Shining shoes is hard work.
2. The honesty of a child reveals a king's foolishness.
3. Learning is fun.
4. Two children outsmart a witch and return to their parents.
5. A girl finds a solution to a dinosaur's problem and a future career for herself.

C. Place a "C" in the blank beside each statement which reveals characterization. Place an "N" beside those statements which do not.

_____1. Mrs. Frisby lives with her children, a group of mice.

_____2. The Fox is very wise.

_____3. Amos wants to be free.

_____4. Chanticleer is very beautiful.

_____5. Chanticleer is vain.

D. Before you complete the next five statements, you will need to re-familiarize yourself with -- or read for the first time -- five children's stories. Either your instructor will provide these books for you, or you may find them readily available in any children's library collection. The stories are

Finders Keepers by William Lipkind, Illustrated by Nicolas Mordvinoff

Curious George Rides a Bike by H.A. Rey

Gilberto and the Wind by Marie Hall Ets

The Happy Owls by Celestino Piatti

Chanticleer and the Fox by Geoffrey Chaucer, illustrated by Barbara Cooney

After reading or reviewing the books, briefly write your answers in the spaces below each question. Use additional paper, if necessary.

1. The two main characters in Finders Keepers are

2. The plot of Curious George Rides a Bike is

3. The trait in Chanticleer which causes him to be caught in Chanticleer and the Fox is

4. The theme of The Happy Owls is

(Answer "True or False" and explain your answer)

5. Gilberto in Gilberto and the Wind is a many-sided character.

Now that you have finished the Pre-Assessment, meet with your instructor to evaluate your performance. Your instructor will check your answers, and you will receive 5 points for each answer which is entirely correct.

A score of 80% or more indicates that you already are able to perform the skill which is the terminal objective for this module. You may therefore exit from this module.

If you have a score of below 80%, you should not feel discouraged. Your score simply indicates that you will benefit from the information and activities contained in this module. Turn to page 17 and begin your work in Element I.

ELEMENT I

Objective:

After reading two articles and five children's stories, you will accurately identify the themes in each story, according to specified criteria.

This element consists of two required activities which will help you identify themes in children's stories. In the first activity, there are three alternative reading selections. You are required to read only two selections, but because they are short, you may want to read all three.

Activity 2 lists five children's stories which you will read. In the event that you have read any or all of the stories previously, you may merely want to re-familiarize yourself with them. However, you should make sure that where there is more than one version for a story, you have read the one by the author listed in the Bibliography of Children's Stories on pages 65-66 in the Appendix. The Bibliography of Children's Stories also indicates that the story may be available on recordings, cassettes, and filmstrips. If such media are accessible, you may prefer to hear and/or view the story, rather than read it.

After you have completed the activities in this element, you will take Self-Assessment I-A, which consists of five items. As stated in the Overview, the evaluation for the Self-Assessment requires that you consult with one or more peers who have completed this module or who are taking it along with you. You and a small group of peers may want to meet in a seminar-type situation to

discuss your statements and decide whether you have met the criteria for the Self-Assessment. If you are the only person in your program working on this module, then you will need to meet with your instructor who will help you evaluate your answers.

If you and your peers or instructor agree that you have answered four out of five items correctly, for a score of at least 80%, you may proceed to Element II. If you have answered correctly three items or less, you must follow the directions at the end of Activity 2 and re-enter this element.

Activity 1

This activity consists of three reading selections. Each selection defines or describes "theme," and discusses its importance in the structure of good children's stories. You are required to read the first selection but you may choose to read either the second or third. Because the selections are brief, you may prefer to read all three. After you have completed this activity, go on to Activity 2.

As you read, keep in mind that your understanding of theme will be an important factor in your being able to use good critical judgment in the selection of reading material for children.

Required:

Read "Theme," in Children and Books by Arbuthnot and Sutherland. Appendix, page 63.

Choose one:

Read "What is a Theme?", pages 20-21.

Read "Theme," in Children and Their Literature, by Constantine Georgiou, Appendix, pages 56 and 58.

What is a Theme?

One of the main objectives in freshman English courses is for students to improve their writing skills. Instructors generally require them to write papers called "themes." In this assignment, the student develops in written form a main idea and supports it with quotations, ideas from other articles and books, and perhaps examples from his or her own experiences or from the lives of other people.

Fiction also contains a main idea or "theme." This idea, which may be implied in and runs throughout the story, may make a point, provide a moral lesson, or describe a modern or timeless human struggle. There is, however, a difference between the plot of the story and the theme. A description of a plot tells exactly what happens in a specific story. A theme, which tells what the story means, is more general and can apply to other stories as well. The plot contains action and the theme contains the thought behind what you have read. "Survival," for example, is a broad theme which appears in many stories. Yet the plots of these stories will all contain different conflicts which require various solutions and characters who act in unique ways to overcome obstacles in order to survive.

In some stories, the theme may seem too dogmatic or didactic. Literature of this type is often called "propagandistic" or "heavy-handed." The main purpose of such stories appears to be to influence or proselytize the reader. There is a difference, then, in a story

which presents its theme in the form of "this is the only way" or "this is the only idea worth considering," and the story which presents its theme as "an idea you may have thought of, but have not been able to express," or as "an idea which has been common to many people throughout time."

Many stories are written solely for fun and adventure and are read for enjoyment. People can enjoy these stories simply because they are "good stories" and nothing more. However, when an author combines a theme with a good story, the reader may gain new perceptions about life and about his or her own experiences. Teachers often select stories whose themes demonstrate and teach some concept or endeavor that is significant or relevant to the child.

Examples of Themes in Stories:

The theme in June Jordan's (T.Y. Crowel) Fannie Lou Hammer may be expressed as "women's struggle to overcome social inequalities and ends."

The theme of The Three Little Pigs may be expressed as "diligence and intelligence protect one from one's natural enemies."

Activity 2

The children's stories around which this activity is built are

1. The High King, by Lloyd Alexander
2. Andy and the Lion, by James Dougherty
3. Charlotte and the White Horse, by Ruth Krauss, Illustrated by Maurice Sendak
4. Crow Boy, by Taro Yashima
5. Call It Courage, by Armstrong Sperry

You are required to read (or re-familiarize yourself with) all five stories in order to complete this activity successfully. Each story possesses a "theme" as part of its overall literary structure. Using the concepts you learned in Activity 1, look for what you consider to be the main theme in each story. Then try to express this theme in the form of a brief statement. In analyzing your theme statement, you should be able to answer "Yes" to each of the following questions:

1. Does my statement contain an idea rather than an action?
2. Is the idea a main idea?
3. Will my statement of the theme be able to serve as a generality for other stories with different developments?
4. Does my statement of theme take into account the actions of at least one of the main characters in the story?

After you have finished reading all three stories, complete Self-Assessment I-A on page 24. Meet with a peer, a group of peers, or your instructor who will help you evaluate your answers.

If you agree that you have correctly identified at least four themes for a score of 80%, you may enter Element II.

If you identified three themes or less, re-enter Activity 1 of this element. Read any alternative selection you did not read the first time, or if you have read all three, review them carefully. Then read again the stories for which you were not able to identify the theme. In the appropriate space provided in Self-Assessment I-B, use the four guideline questions in Activity 2--or your own reasons--to briefly explain why your theme statement was incorrect. When you think you have satisfactorily completed this final assessment, go on to Element II.

Self-Assessment I

A. In the space provided below the title of each story, write a brief statement which describes the theme. After you have finished, meet with your peer(s) or your instructor to evaluate your statements.

1. The High King

2. Andy and the Lion

3. Charlotte and the White Horse

4. Crow Boy

5. Call It Courage

B. If you failed to identify at least four out of the five themes correctly, follow the directions in the final paragraph of Activity 2 and re-enter Activity 1. Using the four guideline questions on page 22 in Activity 2, or your own reasons, briefly explain why each statement marked incorrect in I-A could not have been the theme of the story. Use additional paper, if necessary.

ELEMENT II

Objective:

After reading two articles and five children's stories, you will accurately identify the plots in each story according to the specified criteria.

This element will provide you with the experiences that will help you to identify the plots in children's stories. As in Element I, there are two required activities and a Self-Assessment.

In Activity 1, there are three reading selections and a Diagnostic Self-Check. The first selection is required, but you have a choice between the second and the third. Again, however, because the selections are very short, you may prefer to read all three.

In Activity 2, you will be reading five children's stories, all of which contain a plot. In the event that you have read any or all of the stories previously, you may want to save time by simply re-familiarizing yourself with those you have read. Make certain, however, that you are reading the story by the author listed in the Bibliography of Children's Stories on pages 65-66. If there are filmstrips cassettes, or recordings of any of these versions available, you may prefer to view or hear the stories.

After you have completed the activities in this element, you will take Self-Assessment II-A consisting of five items. The evaluation for the Self-Assessment requires that you consult with

one or more peers who have completed or who are also taking this module. You and a small group of peers may want to meet in a seminar-type situation to discuss your statements and decide whether you have met the criteria for the Self-Assessment. If you are the only person in your program working on this module, then you will need to meet with your instructor who will help you evaluate your answers. If you and your peer(s) or your instructor agree that you have answered four out of five items correctly for a score of at least 80%, you will have completed the work in this element successfully and may go on to Element III. If you have answered three questions or fewer correctly, you must follow the directions at the end of Activity 2 and re-enter the first activity of this element.

Activity 1

There are three reading selections and a Self-Check in this activity. The first reading selection is required, but you have a choice between the second and the third. However, you may prefer to read all three. Each selection defines or describes "plot" and discusses why it is integral to the development of good children's stories. While you are reading these articles, keep in mind that your ability to recognize plots will be a key factor in selecting good books for children.

The Diagnostic Self-Check on page 31 will test your knowledge of what you have read. Page 32 lists the correct answers. For any incorrect answers, refer again to the reading selections and analyze your mistakes. If you are still uncertain about a particular item or items on the Self-Check, consult with your instructor or a peer who has successfully completed this activity. Diagnosis of your errors now will help you to work more successfully in Activity 2.

Required:

Read "Plot," Children and Books, by Arbuthnot and Sutherland. Appendix, pages 61-63.

Choose one:

Read "What Is a Plot," pages 28-29.

Read "Plot," Children and Their Literature, by Constantine Georgiou. Appendix, pages 56 and 58.

What is a Plot?

The plot is what happens in a story. Fiction, drama, and even the events of everyday life contain plots. In real life, you can easily discover plots in the reports you read in newspapers and watch on television or through your own perceptions of situations. The easiest way to identify a plot in a fictional story is to look for a conflict. A conflict may occur between two or more characters, between a character and the environment, or within the character (human or animal) itself. The conflict generally reveals itself in the form of disagreements, opposing interests or goals, and misunderstandings, or in struggles against circumstances or forces beyond the character's control.

Once you have located the nature of the conflict, you will then be able to look for the entire plot of the story. The plot develops the conflict in three stages:

1. The beginning--Where does the conflict begin? What caused the conflict?

2. The middle--At what point in the story do the two opposing forces (or characters) confront each other in such a way that you know that one or the other--or both--will never be the same again? At what point in the story is the tension at its greatest?

3. The ending--What ends the conflict? How is the problem solved?

In children's literature, the conflict should be related to the child's experiential level. The teacher must keep in mind that

for certain young children, a plot may be too complicated, the relationships too adult, or the conflict too subtle or specialized. As a result the child may not understand the story or may simply lose interest.

The teacher's ability to select stories which appeal to children and which children can understand is therefore important. By being able to easily identify plots and conlifcts in a variety of children's stories, the teacher will have a firmer basis for judging the value of new or unfamiliar material.

Examples of plots in children's stories:

In The Three Little Pigs, the plot concerns how three little pigs build their homes to protect themselves from the hungry wolf.

The plot in Marguerite de Angeli's The Door in the Wall develops around Robin, a young, handicapped boy who plays a heroic role in saving a beleaguered medieval city.

Diagnostic Self-Check: Distinguishing the "Plot"of a Story

Place a "P" in the blank beside each item which identifies or relates to the structure of a story plot. Leave all other blanks unmarked.

_____1. Sequence

_____2. He is nasty.

_____3. Beginning, middle, end.

_____4. Conflict

_____5. Describe her dress.

_____6. Once upon a time in a far off land.....

_____7. During his first year in school, Frank struggled to communicate with the other children.

_____8. Dancing in the street.

_____9. Resolution

_____10. For giving fire to people, the Gods punish Prometheus by tying him to a mountain for the vultures to peck at his liver.

Check items on page 32. If you have any incorrect answers, refer to the articles you have read and analyze your mistakes. When you feel you have completed this activity satisfactorily, go on to Activity 2.

Answer Key for Diagnostic Self-Check on page 31

Distinguishing the "Plot" of a story.

1. P
2.
3. P
4. P
5.
6.
7. P
8.
9. P
10. P

Activity 2

In this activity, you are required to read for the first time (or refamiliarize yourself with) the following five stories:

1. Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of Nimh, by Robert C. O'Brien
2. The Wheel on the School, by Meindert De Jong
3. The Tale of Benjamin Bunny, by Beatrix Potter
4. Caps for Sale, by Esphyr Slobodkina
5. The Cat Who Went to Heaven, by Elizabeth Coatsworth

Each of these stories is built around a plot. Using the concepts you learned about plots in Activity 1, try to identify the elements which make up the main plot in each story you read. Although the plot may consist of a number of interconnecting steps, you will want to be able to express the plot in the form of a brief, but comprehensive statement.

When you think you have identified the plot, analyze your statement by asking yourself these questions:

1. Have I described a sequence?
2. Is there a beginning, middle and end?
3. Does my statement depict or imply a conflict?
4. Does the statement of plot also describe the self-confrontations, development or changes of the main character and/or the main character's relationship to nature or another character?

After you have read all five stories, complete Self-Assessment II-A on page 35. Meet with a peer, a group of peers,

or your instructor who will help you evaluate your answers. If you agree that you have satisfactorily identified the plots in at least four stories (for a score of at least 80%), you have completed your work in Element II and may go on to Element III.

If you failed to score 80% or above--that is, correctly answered only three questions or fewer--re-enter Activity 1 of this element. Read the alternate selection you did not choose the first time and review carefully the information in the other two selections. Read again and analyze those stories for which you were unable to identify the plot. Then answer the two questions in Self-Assessment II-B for each of these stories. When you are satisfied that you have successfully completed this final assessment, proceed to Element III.

Self-Assessment II

A. In the space provided below the title of each story, write a brief statement which describes the plot. After you have finished, meet with your peer(s) or your instructor to evaluate your answers.

1. Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of Nimh

2. The Wheel on the School

3. The Tale of Benjamin Bunny

4. Caps for Sale

5. The Cat Who Went to Heaven

B. If you identified at least four out of five plots for the above stories, do not answer these questions. Go on to Element III. If you had fewer than four correct, follow the directions in the final paragraph of Activity 2. Then in the space below complete the following two items for each story in which you were unable to identify the plot. Use additional paper, if necessary.

1. Briefly describe the beginning, middle and end of the story.

2. Briefly describe the main conflict and identify the forces or characters involved.

ELEMENT III

Objective:

After reading two articles and five children's stories, you will accurately identify the characterizations in each story according to the specified criteria.

There are two required activities and a Self-Assessment in this element. Together, they will give you the information and experience you need to be able to recognize "characterization" in children's stories.

Activity 1 consists of three reading selections on "characterization." The first selection is required, but you have a choice between the second and the third. Although you are required to read only two articles, you may prefer to read all three.

In Activity 2 you will be reading five children's stories in which "characterization" is a fundamental part of the overall structure. If you have already read any or all of these stories, you may simply want to re-familiarize yourself with them. In case there is more than one version of a story, make certain that you read the one by the author listed in the Bibliography of Children's Stories on pages 65-66. Filmstrips, cassettes, and/or recordings of these stories are usually available. These media offer you the option of viewing or hearing, as well as reading the stories.

At the end of Activity 2, you will take Self-Assessment III-A, which consists of five items. The evaluation for the Self-Assessment

requires that you consult with one or more peers who have completed or who are also taking this module. You and a small group of peers may want to meet in a seminar-type situation to discuss your statements and decide whether you have met the criteria for the Self-Assessment. If you are the only person in your program working on this module, then you will need to meet with your instructor who will help you evaluate your answers. If you and your peer(s) or your instructor agree that you have answered four out of five items correctly, for a score of at least 80%, you will have satisfactorily completed the work in this element. You may then go on to Element IV.

Activity 1

The three reading selections in this activity will provide you with information about the use of "characterization" as a literary structure in good children's stories. You are required to read the first passage, but you have the option of reading only one of the second and third selections. Because the selections are brief, you may want to read all three.

After you have read the articles, take the Diagnostic Self-Check on page 41. Page 42 lists the correct answers. If you had any incorrect answers, review the reading selections and analyze your mistakes. If you are still uncertain about a particular item or items on the Self-Check, consult with your instructor, or a peer who has successfully completed this activity. Diagnosis of your errors now will help you to work more successfully in the remainder of this module.

Required:

Read "Characters," Children and Books, by Arbuthnot and Sutherland. Appendix, pages 60-61.

Choose one:

Read "What is Characterization?", pages 39-40.

Read "Characterization," Children and Their Literature, by Constantine Georgiou. Appendix, pages 57 and 59.

What is Characterization?

Characterization is perhaps the most appealing element in children's stories. There are two aspects of characterization: the character (human, animal, or object) in the story itself and the attitudes or qualities which make the character represent or imitate real-life figures. The child should be able to enjoy the character in the story and at the same time be able to compare and contrast this character with people, animals, or objects in the everyday world.

The author may use one or a number of different techniques to reveal the qualities, physical appearances, and attitudes of the characters. We may learn what a character is like when the character engages in dialogue (or conversation) with another character, when the character thinks silently or aloud and when the character acts--by what the character does and how it's done. The author generally uses dialogue and action to express characterization in children's stories. Direct statements or phrases reveal such static, external attributes as age, gender, bodily or facial appearance, habitual or reoccurring moods and expressions, clothing, vocation, and surroundings. Frequently, a stereotypic character is built around descriptions of these external attributes.

There are generally two types of characters in children's stories. The <u>flat</u> character is built around a single idea or quality. <u>Round</u> characters grow and change and often emerge as principal characters.

No two people in the world are alike, yet each person shares some common traits or experiences with one or more other individuals.

The same is true for the characters in a story. We describe as "probable" the ordinary human qualities and attributes which a character exhibits. We describe as "marvelous" or "exceptional" those tendencies which make a character different or strongly individualistic. Generally, the characters who are the most extraordinary are the most interesting.

The process of storytelling continues and evolves because every era develops a unique mood and produces individuals with new and different combinations of qualities and attitudes. Children in each succeeding generation naturally look for new characters who will match the people they encounter as they grow up in their own world. There are certain characters, however, whose appeal is great enough to last beyond the era during which they were created. Stories which contain such characters are called classics.

Examples of characterizations in children's stories:

1. In P. L. Travers' Mary Poppins, the title character is a caustic, self-righteous nanny.

2. In Marguerite de Angeli's Door In the Wall, Robin is an upper-class, arrogant, and ungrateful youth.

3. The principal characterization in The Three Little Pigs is of the diligent and hardworking third little pig, who builds a house of brick.

Diagnostic Self-Check: Characterization in Stories

Place a "T" in the blank beside those statements which identify the elements of characterization. Place an "F" beside those statements which are false with respect to characterization.

_____1. A character may be a tree.

_____2. The best character is ordinary rather than unique.

_____3. Even if the character is not involved in the action, it is important to describe his or her appearance and habits.

_____4. Stories may not present stereotyped characters.

_____5. A character in a children's story should not be too individualistic.

_____6. Characterization is not important to children.

_____7. Characterization may be derived from an analysis of the actions of the character, as well as from straight descriptive passages.

_____8. Characters should always have heroic stature.

_____9. A flat characterization is used in caricature.

____10. Characterization may be developed through dialogue.

Check your answers on page 42. If you have any incorrect items, refer to the articles you have read and analyze your mistakes. When you feel you have completed this activity satisfactorily, go on to Activity 2.

Answer Key for Diagnostic Self-Check on page 41

Characterization in stories.

1. T
2. F
3. F
4. F
5. F
6. F
7. T
8. F
9. T
10. T

Activity 2

In this activity, you will be reading five children's stories. If you have read any or all of these stories previously, you may simply want to re-familiarize yourself with them.

The stories are

1. It's Like This, Cat, by Emily Neville
2. Mike Mulligan and His Steamshovel, by Virginia Lee Burton
3. Strawberry Girl, by Lois Lenski
4. The Tale of Peter Rabbit, by Beatrix Potter
5. Shen of the Sea, by Arthur Bowie Chrisman

These five stories demonstrate the use of characterization as a literary structure. In Activity 1, you learned about the elements which are necessary in order for a character to be created. In this activity, you will try to identify the main characterizations in each of the five stories. Be able to express in a brief but comprehensive statement those inherent qualities which make up the nature of the principal character.

The following questions may guide you in developing your statement of characterization:

1. Have you described the ordinary and the unique qualities for each principal character?
2. Did you explain how the characterization was revealed--that is, in the action, the dialogue or descriptions?
3. Does your statement of characterization tell or imply how or why the principal character is different from other characters in the story?

Complete Self-Assessment III-A on page 45 after you have read all five stories. Meet with a peer, a group of peers, or your instructor who will help you evaluate your answers. If you agree that you have satisfactorily identified the characterizations in at least four stories, for a score of at least 80%, you have completed your work in this element and may go on to Element IV.

If you failed to score 80% or above--that is, correctly answered only three questions or fewer, re-enter Activity 1 of this element. Read the alternative selection you did not choose the first time and review carefully the information in the other two selections. Re-analyze those stories for which you were not able to satisfactorily state the characterization. Then answer the three questions in Self-Assessment III-B for each of these stories. When you are satisfied that you have successfully completed this final assessment, proceed to Element IV.

Self-Assessment III

A. In the space provided below the title of each of the stories, write a brief statement which describes the plot. After you have finished, meet with your peer(s) or your instructor who will help you check your answers.

1. It's Like This, Cat

2. Mike Mulligan and His Steamshovel

3. Strawberry Girl

4. The Tale of Peter Rabbit

5. Shen of the Sea

B. If you could provide accurate statements of characterization for at least four out of the five stories listed above, do not answer these questions. You may go directly to Element IV. If you had fewer than four correct, follow the directions in the final paragraph of Activity 2. Then in the space below, answer the following three questions for each story for which you were unable to supply a satisfactory statement of characterization:

1. Who do you think was the principal character in the story?

2. What were the qualities of this character?

3. Was the characterization revealed through action, dialogue, or pure description?

ELEMENT IV

Objective:

After reading five children's stories, you will accurately identify, according to specified criteria, the literary structures of plot, theme, and characterization in each of the stories.

Activity

There is only one activity in this element. You will be reading five children's stories after which you will check your knowledge of literary structures by identifying the themes, plots, and characterizations in Self-Assessment IV-A. You should consider the activity in this element as an exercise in integrating the concepts you have learned in the previous elements. This activity will also serve as a practice session for the Post-Assessment, which will determine whether or not you have successfully completed this module.

If you have read any or all of the required stories previously, you may merely want to refresh your memory by skimming through them. Make certain, however, that you are reading the story by the author listed in the Bibliography of Children's Stories on pages 65-66. If there are filmstrips, cassettes, or recordings of any of these versions available, you may prefer to use these media rather than reading.

The five stories are

1. Johnny Tremain, by Esther Forbes
2. Little Bear's Visit, by Else Minarik, illustrated by Maurice Sendak
3. Carry on Mr. Bowditch, by Jean Lee Latham
4. The Three Billy Goats Gruff, by P.C. Asbjornsen and J.E. Moe, illustrated by Marcia Brown
5. Angus and the Ducks, by Marjorie Flack

After you have read, viewed, or heard these stories, you will take Self Assessment IV-A in which you will demonstrate your knowledge of literary structures. The evaluation for the Self-Assessment requires that you consult with one or more peers who have completed or who are also taking this module. You and a small group of peers may want to meet in a seminar-type situation to discuss your statements and decide whether you have met the criteria for the Self-Assessment. If you are the only person in your program working on this module, then you will need to meet with your instructor who will help you evaluate your answers.

If you have answered four out of five items correctly, for a score of at least 80%, you will have completed the work in Element IV. You may then take the Post-Assessment for this module.

If you have not answered at least four correctly, read thoroughly those stories for which you could not identify any or all of the literary structures. Also review the reading selections in Element I-III describing theme, plot, and characterization. Then answer all the questions in Self-Assessment IV-B which correspond to those literary structures you did not describe accurately. When you are satisfied that you are able to meet the objectives for this element, take the Post-Assessment for this module.

Self-Assessment IV

A. In the space provided below the title of each of the five stories you have read, write three brief statements which identify the theme, plot, and characterization. You must identify all three parts of one story in order for your answer to be considered correct. When you have finished, meet with your peer(s) or your instructor to help you evaluate your answers.

1. Johnny Tremain

2. Little Bear's Visit

3. Carry on Mr. Bowditch

4. The Three Billy Goats Gruff

5. Angus and the Ducks

B. If you identified the theme, plot and characterization in each of the stories above, do not answer these questions below. Go directly to the Post-Assessment for this module. If you answered correctly three items or fewer, follow the directions at the final paragraph of the activity in Element IV. Then complete any of the following questions which correspond to those literary structures you did not describe accurately for the five stories.

1. What is the main idea in the story?

2. What is the conflict in the story and how does it begin and how is it resolved?

3. What are two or more characteristics of the principal character in the story? Were these characteristics revealed through action, dialogue, or direct description?

POST-ASSESSMENT

The Post-Assessment, like the Pre-Assessment, will test your overall understanding of themes, plots and characterizations. In addition, it will test your ability to identify those literary structures which make a story informative and exciting, as well as appropriate, for children to read.

For the Post-Assessment, you will need to read for the first time or re-familiarize yourself with ten stories. In case there is more than one version of a story, make certain that you read the one by the author listed in the Bibliography on pages 65-66. Filmstrips, cassettes, and/or recordings of these stories are usually available and offer you the option of viewing or hearing, as well as reading, them.

After you have finished reading each story, first identify and then describe in a brief statement the literary structure which you consider to be the strongest and most important. In other words, based on your understanding of themes, plots and characterizations, select the particular structure which you think makes the story outstanding. Although the purpose of this module is to test your ability to identify literary structures in children's stories, you will also be taking the first step toward applying that skill to selecting appropriate reading materials for children.

After you have finished the Post-Assessment, give this booklet with your answers to your instructor. After checking your answers, you instructor will meet with you to evaluate your performance. If both of you agree that you have accurately answered

at least 8 out of 10 items with a score of 80% or above, you will have completed the Post-Assessment satisfactorily and may exit from this module. You will have demonstrated that you now possess the skill that is the terminal objective for this module.

If you did not score 80%, your instructor will advise you about re-entering the module.

The ten stories are

1. King of the Wind, by Marguerite Henry
2. Amos Fortune, Free Man, by Elizabeth Yates
3. The Biggest Bear, by Lynd Ward
4. The Magic Ball and Other Tales from Silver Lands, by Charles J. Finger
5. Gay-Neck: The Story of a Pigeon, by Ohan Gopal Mukerji
6. The Door in the Wall, by Marguerite de Angeli
7. Tales from Grimm, by Wanda Gag
8. Make Way for Ducklings, by Robert McCloskey
9. Umbrella, by Taro Yashima
10. The Snowy Day, by Ezra Jack Keats

In the blank beside "A" under each title identify the literary structure (theme, plot, characterization) you believe was the strongest, most essential, or most outstanding in the story. Then in the space provided at "B," describe that structure in a brief statement. Both "A" and "B" must be completed in order for your answer to be evaluated.

1. King of the Wind

A.

B.

2. Amos Fortune

A.

B.

3. The Biggest Bear

A.

B.

4. The Magic Ball and Other Tales from Silver Lands

A.

B.

5. Gay-Neck: The Story of a Pigeon

A.

B.

6. The Door in the Wall

A.

B.

7. Tales from Grimm

A.

B.

8. Make Way for Ducklings

A.

B.

9. Umbrella

A.

B.

10. The Snowy Day

A.

B.

APPENDIX

From: * CHILDREN AND THEIR LITERATURE

by Constantine Georgiou

In literature, in full-length works particularly, each literary element performs an important function in making the work come alive. But the degree to which life is experienced in this art form is dependent upon the harmonious unity of the literary elements as they are interwoven into the structure of the book.

Definition and Description of Literary Elements

THEME

By definition, the central and pervading purpose or key idea of a literary work is its "theme." Frequently a single theme dominates a story, and sometimes a central idea with minor themes relating to life is employed in the story telling. For children, however, the theme has meaning only as it relates to their experiences. If a story has a theme and subthemes that point up concepts not readily comprehended by young readers because of their limited emotional and chronological growth, then the work fails to possess appeal for children, and consequently it fails to be classified as literature for children.

PLOT

Plot is the term applied to a series of progressing, inter-related actions leading to a climax in a story.

The various incidents or episodes in a plot are usually planned, arranged, and designed to unfold in a lifelike way so that the story becomes convincing. Since the story plot is invented and not taken over completely from real life, it depends for this upon its logical sequence and natural outcome.

In fact, a well-knit plot composed of a highly selected series of actions and the characters involved in them serves to simplify life by imposing order upon it and by turning the lens on life in sharp focus.

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* Constantine Georgiou, CHILDREN AND THEIR LITERATURE ©1969. Reprinted by permission of Prentice-Hall, Inc. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey.

CHARACTERIZATION

In fictionalized biographies or true biographies, actual persons are drawn to reveal their true natures and personalities. The creation of imaginary figures--animate or inanimate--is a skill employed in fiction. The test of good characterization is the ability of an author to present characters who are believable even though they may be carved out of his imagination.

If characterization is well done, children can readily identify with the characters and the situations in which they appear. In this sense, characters become the vehicles that carry young readers into the story.

Although these literary elements are found in universal literature--and children's books must be considered as a portion of this literary body-- there are specific questions one must ask about those divisions of literature designed for children in order to set up criteria for evaluation. And these questions will grow out of a clear understanding of basic literary elements observable in literature for children. With very few exceptions, the criteria for each literary element are essentially the same as those for literature in general. Leaving aside for the moment factual materials and books of poetry, the essentials of fine prose for children may be determined in the following way.

Theme

- Is the theme made clear?
- Does it reveal the author's purpose and the ideas that emphasize the story?
- Is the theme (or themes) appropriate to the developmental age level for which it is intended?
- Are the ideas in the story worth imparting to children?
- Do these ideas appeal to childhood, regardless of age levels, because they share healthy human emotions and values that reflect universal life?
- Does the theme inspire young readers without moralizing so that "truths worthy of lasting forever"[36] are derived unobtrusively from the books?

Plot

- Is the action built around the theme of the story?
- Is this "action" expressed through a series of interrelated progressing forces that play upon each other?
- Does the conflict in the book become recognizable as the series of interrelated actions is unraveled?

---

[36]Paul Hazard, Books, Children and Men (Boston: The Horn Book, Inc., 1960), p.44.

- Are the incidents or episodes a part of a well-knit plan appropriate to the storytelling?
- Do events follow one another in a logical progression so that following the story is facilitated?
- Is there orderly transition provided from one period to another; from one event or episode to another; and by virture of characters' actions?
- Is the movement sequential and observable so that the passage of time is understood?
- Are the events, actions, conflicts, and their interplay in a story plausible?

Characterization

- Is the character portrayal clear and convincing enough to be believed?
- Do the characters lend themselves to reader identification?
- Are the characters drawn with characteristics that give each of them individuality?
- Can the characters, despite their individuality, reflect back to the reader a measure of himself as a human being?
- Do the characters come alive during their development?
- Is their development consistent, real, and true to humankind?
- Are the characters so drawn that they also serve as vehicles for communicating to children sound values of a humanistic tradition?
- Can the memorable characters enter a young reader's life to effect change in his personality?

From: *CHILDREN AND BOOKS

May Hill Arbuthnot and Zena Sutherland

Characters

Who are the characters? How are they revealed?

It is clear from the discussion above that a major character is often distinguished by being the first person in the book to be introduced. In a book like *The Peterkin Papers*, however, Lucretia Hale sets the lady from Philadelphia apart by introducing her only when the Peterkin family has become so befuddled that she alone can set them straight. In *Charlotte's Web*, E. B. White presents the pig, Wilbur, through a family's discussion of him. Joseph Krumgold, in . . . *and now Miguel*, opens his story with, "I am Miguel."

We learn something more in his very next words: "For most people it does not make so much difference that I am Miguel. But for me, often, it is a very great trouble." The character may thus be revealed by what is said or done, or – as in the case of Wilbur – by what is said about him.

Characterization can be effected by physical description: if we read that a judge in Colonial Salem has pursed lips and a frowning brow, that he is dressed in somber black and walks with stiff dignity, we anticipate his stern behavior. What a character says, what he does, how he reacts to others, how others talk about him are all clues to his personality. If he is a major character, he must play a dynamic role; if he changes, the change should be logical for the sort of person the author has drawn. There should be depth of characterization, since to emphasize only one or two traits produces a one-dimensional portrait that is often more caricature than characterization.

Characters must be both believable and consistent. Children soon learn how superficial is the patterned mystery story in which no adult contributes to the solution, while an omniscient, persistent, superintelligent child adroitly sees all clues, pursues them, and solves the mystery single-handed, or the career story in which the neophyte reporter acquires an interview which none of the older writers had been able to obtain. The reader can usually prophesy that this stereotype will get a by-line and will marry the editor's daughter.

The characters should develop naturally and behave and talk in ways that are consistent with their age, sex, background, ethnic group, and education.

Whether the story is realistic or fantastic, the characters must be convincing. Although Mary Poppins is in a fanciful story, she is a very convincing character, a severe and crusty individual that no child ever forgets. When Michael asks anxiously, "Mary Poppins, you'll never leave us, will you?" the answer from his new nurse is a stern, "One more word from that direction and I'll call the Policeman." Wilbur, the "radiant pig" in *Charlotte's Web*, and Toad of Toad Hall in *The Wind in the Willows* are just as real to children as is Caddie Woodlawn, the redheaded tomboy. Long after details of plot have been forgotten, children and adults will recall with a chuckle or a warm glow of affection such characters as Jo in *Little Women*, Long John Silver, Henry Huggins, Janey, the middle Moffat, Arrietty in *The Borrowers*, and dozens of other salty book characters. And it is through such well-drawn individuals that children gain new insight into their own personal problems and into their ever widening relationships with other people.

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Arbuthnot, M.H. and Sutherland, Z. Children and Books. Fourth Edition. Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman & Co., 1972. Sections on Characters, Plot and Theme, pages 25-29.

Reprinted by permission of Scott, Foresman & Company.

Illustration by E. H. Shepard. From The Wind in the Willows *by Kenneth Grahame. Published by Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954. Reproduced with permission of the publisher.*

As is appropriate for small children whose chief interest is the action in a story, Charley is revealed more by what he does than by what he says. Cheerfully obstreperous, Charley, who is five and having his first school experiences, has to climb an apple tree to see how apples are attached, and when the class is playing at "hoppity" like Christopher Robin, he hops right out the door. It is further revealing that when the teacher tells him to stay out in the rain, he happily pretends he is a rock and enjoys the rain. In all of his brothers' and sisters' daily inquiries about whether or not he has had the honor of being the flag-carrier, it is clear that they know their little brother and hardly expect it—yet they ask "anxiously" also making it clear that Charley is lovable and loved.

The theme of family love is strong in the *Little House* books, and the first thing we learn about Laura, as she lies in a trundle bed listening to a wolf howl, is the security she feels with Pa there to protect her. We also see in Laura's actions that she is a curious child, far less compliant than her sister Mary—and Mrs. Wilder often uses Mary's behavior as a contrast to define Laura's livelier personality.

Arnold Haithwaite is revealed as a terse, uncommunicative young man by the first passage of dialogue in the story, yet when he confronts the intruder he makes no bones about his incredulity that they have the same name. Stalwart, inflexible, and unafraid, Arnold shows his personality in the tenacious way he insists on his identity even when the intruder has usurped his place by convincing others that he is the real Arnold Haithwaite.

Illustration by Nancy Grossman from Did You Carry the Flag Today, Charley? *by Rebecca Caudill. Copyright © 1966 by Rebecca Caudill. Reproduced by permission of Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.*

Plot

What happens in the story?

Fiction for children usually focuses on what happens, what the action is. In some stories for adults, very little happens in a stream-of consciousness novel or in a quiet character study. While there are some children's books of which this is true, most of them are filled with action. Children want heroes who have obstacles to overcome, conflicts to settle, difficult goals to win. It is the vigorous action in pursuit of these goals that keeps young

VIEWPOINTS

. . . One of the prime achievements in every good fiction has nothing to do with truth or philosophy or a *Weltanschauung* at all. It is the triumphant adjustment of two different kinds of order. On the one hand, the events (the mere plot) have their chronological and causal order, that which they would have in real life. On the other, all the scenes or other divisions of the work must be related to each other according to principles of design, like the masses in a picture or the passages in a symphony. . . . Contrasts (but also premonitions and echoes) between the darker and the lighter, the swifter and the slower, the simpler and the more sophisticated, must have something like a balance, but never a too perfect symmetry, so that the shape of the whole work will be felt as inevitable and satisfying. – C. S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism*, Cambridge University Press, 1961, pp. 81–82.

readers racing along from page to page to find out how the hero achieves his ends. But achieve he must, in some way or other.

A plot is basically a series of actions that move in related sequence to a logical outcome; if there is no sequence or interaction, the book may have a series of episodes (in some books, particularly books of reminiscence, this can be very effective) rather than a plot or story line. Simple as it sounds, a story needs a beginning, a middle, and an end. First the author must set the stage; then, to have development and momentum, a plot needs conflict, opposition, or a problem; last, there should be a definitive ending: a climax of action, or even a strong indication of future resolution. A dramatic example of a powerful ending is that of *Helter-Skelter*, by Patricia Moyes, in which a young girl, hunting a criminal, finds that the pleasant young man in whom she has confided is himself the culprit. Alan Garner's *The Owl Service* has an equally powerful conclusion. Here a contemporary setting is the background for a frightening reenactment of a Celtic myth. In the last scene the legend is laid to rest and young Gwyn finally discovers who his father is.

Linked to the development of the plot are the characters, who affect what happens by the sort of people they are and who are affected by what happens to them. In stories for the very young, the plot is usually simple, with no subplot, whereas older readers can both understand and enjoy the complexity of a story with many threads.

In *Charley*, the story begins with the fact that a small boy going to school for the first time is told by his brothers and sisters that one child is honored each day by being allowed to carry the flag; as the story develops it becomes evident that Charley is an unlikely candidate. Then an understanding teacher acts – and Charley proudly carries the flag.

Little House is an episodic story; although the book and its sequels show the children growing, the separate incidents of

Illustration by Garth Williams. From Little House in the Big Woods *by Laura Ingalls Wilder. Copyright 1932 Laura Ingalls Wilder; renewed copyright, © 1953, as to pictures, by Garth Williams. Reprinted by permission of Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc.*

the story might often be interchanged without affecting the outcome.

The plot of *The Intruder* has high dramatic quality. (It was, in fact, filmed for television.) Arnold Haithwaite learns almost immediately that the stranger who establishes himself in Arnold's home is a threat to him—since Arnold is not quite sure of who he really is. He calls the old man with whom he lives "Dad," not having been told that he is the old man's illegitimate grandson. In the struggle for dominance between the boy and the stranger, the plot is given momentum by the fact that the stranger wants not only to take command of the household but also to commercialize the town. The fact that Arnold does not at first know his real identity gives the author an opportunity to unravel threads of past events as well as the immediate action. The conclusion fulfills the promise of the story's opening: a desperate chase on the sands, with the drowning of the criminal in the swift tide and Arnold reaching the safety of an old church, long deserted because it has been for many years cut off from the mainland at high tide.

Theme

What is the main idea of the story?

The theme of the story is its central core, its meaning. For example, the theme of . . . *and now Miguel* is the struggle to attain competence in one's chosen work and so be accepted as a responsible, mature person. The same theme appears in Bianca Bradbury's *The Loner*. In Elizabeth Coatsworth's *Bess and the Sphinx* the theme is overcoming shyness. Often in children's books the theme reflects those developmental values that are inherent in the process of growing up. The theme may be concerned with overcoming jealousy or fear, adjusting to a physical handicap, or accepting a stepparent. Books that have these or other developmental values can help not only the child who shares similar problems but also the child who does not and who needs to learn sympathy and understanding.

Not all books have such themes; some are adventure stories, some written just for fun, and some historical fiction is intended only to highlight a person, a movement, or a period. Indeed, there can be no hard and fast rule about any of the elements of fiction, since there are good books in which almost any aspect may be omitted. The elements discussed here are those which exist in most books.

The theme in *Charley* is that of achieving status and acceptance: Charley has been told that carrying the flag is the signal honor of the school day, and although he is really more excited, by the end of the story, by the fact that he owns his first book, he is well aware that the sign of approval has been carrying the flag. Although the *Little House*

From Bess and the Sphinx *by Elizabeth Coatsworth. Illustration by Bernice Loewenstein. Illustration © Macmillan, 1967.*

VIEWPOINTS

. . . Participation in the continuity of narrative leads to the discovery or recognition of the theme, which is the narrative seen as total design. This theme is what, as we say, the story has been all about, the point of telling it. What we reach at the end of participation becomes the center of our critical attention. The elements in the narrative thereupon regroup themselves in a new way. Certain unusually vivid bits of characterization or scenes of exceptional intensity move up near the center of our memory. This reconstructing and regrouping of elements in our critical response to a narrative goes on more or less unconsciously. . . .—Northrop Frye, "The Road of Excess," in *Myth and Symbol; Critical Approaches and Applications*, Northrop Frye, L. C. Knights, and others, edited by Bernice Slote, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1963, p. 9.

books are imbued with family love and pioneer courage, there really is no underlying theme. In *The Intruder*, for all the drama of the action, the theme is the boy's quest for identity.

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF CHILDREN'S STORIES IN BOOK AND MEDIA FORM

Title of Book	Author	Publisher	Age	Type Media	Media Company
Amos Fortune, Free Man	Elizabeth Yates	Dutton 1950	9-12	Record, Cassette, Sound Filmstrip (3008)	Miller-Brody Productions
Andy and the Lion	James Dougherty	Viking 1969	4- 8	SF9-SF9C- Sound Filmstrip film	Western Woods
Angus and the Ducks	Marjorie Flack	Doubleday 1930	3- 6	SF39, SF39C-Filmstrip	Western Woods
The Biggest Bear	Lynn Ward	Houghton Mifflin 1952	4- 8	SF10-SF10C-Filmstrip	Western Woods
Call It Courage	Armstrong Sperry	Macmillan 1940	10-12	Sound Filmstrip (3002)	Miller-Brody Productions
Caps for Sale	Esphyr Slobodkina	William R. Scott 1940	3- 6	SF12-SF12C- Filmstrip, film	Western Woods
Carry on Mr. Bowditch	Jean Lee Latham	Houghton Mifflin 1956	12-14	Record, Cassette, Sound Filmstrip (3004)	Miller-Brody Productions
The Cat Who Went to Heaven	Elizabeth Coatsworth	Macmillan 1930	8-10	Sound Filmstrip (3004)	Miller-Brody Productions
Chanticleer and the Fox	Geoffrey Chaucer illus. by Barbara Cooney	Thomas Y. Crowell 1948	4- 8	SF26-SF26C-Filmstrip	Western Woods
Charlotte and the White Horse	Ruth Krauss, illus. by Maurice Sendak	Harper	3- 6	Filmstrip	Western Woods
Crow Boy	Taro Yashima	Viking 1955	5- 8	SF42-SF42C-Film, Filmstrip	Western Woods
Curious George Rides a Bike	H.A. Rey	Houghton Mifflin 1952	3- 6	SF17-SF17C-Film, Filmstrip	Western Woods
The Door in the Wall	Marguerite deAngeli	Doubleday 1949	10-12	Sound Filmstrip (3016)	Miller-Brody Productions
Finders Keepers	William Lipkind, illus. by Nicholas Mordvinoff	Harcourt 1951	4- 8	Filmstrip	Western Woods
Gay-Neck: The Story of a Pigeon	Ohan Gopal Mukerji	E. P. Dutton 1927	12-14	Sound Filmstrip (3501)	Miller-Brody Productions
Gilberto and the Wind	Marie Hall Ets	Viking 1963	3- 6	Filmstrip (SF104-SF104C)	Western Woods
The Happy Owls	Celestino Piatti	Atheneum 1964	4- 8	SF63-SF63C-Film,Filmstrip	Western Woods
The High King	Lloyd Alexander	Holt, Rinehart & Winston 1969	10-14	Sound Filmstrip (3502)	Miller-Brody Productions

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Title of Book	Author	Publisher	Age	Type Media	Media Company
It's Like This, Cat	Emily Neville	Harper & Row 1963	10-14	Record, Cassette (3017)	Miller-Brody Productions
Johnny Tremain	Esther Forbes	Houghton Mifflin 1945	12-16	Record, Cassette (3007)	Miller-Brody Productions
King of the Wind	Marguerite Henry	Rand McNally	9-11	Sound Filmstrip (3021)	Miller-Brody Productions
Little Bear's Visit	Else Minarik, illus. by Maurice Sendak	Harper 1961	4 -8	SF83-SF83C-Filmstrip	Western Woods
The Magic Ball and Other Tales from Silver Lands	Charles J. Finger	Doubleday & Page 1924	8-10	Sound Filmstrip	Miller-Brody Productions
Make Way for Ducklings	Robert McCloskey	Viking 1941	5- 7	Film, Filmstrip (SF3-SF3C)	Western Woods
Mike Mulligan and His Steamshovel	Virginia Lee Burton	Houghton Mifflin 1939	4- 8	SF4-SF4C- Film,Filmstrip	Western Woods
Millions of Cats	Wanda Gag	Coward-McCann 1928	3- 6	SF5-SF5C-Film, Filmstrips	Western Woods
Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of Nimh	Robert C. O'Brien	Athensunn	8-12	Sound Filmstrip	Miller-Brody Productions
Shen of the Sea	Arthur Bowie Chrisman	Dutton 1925	9-12	Sound Filmstrip (3002)	Miller-Brody Productions
The Snowy Day	Ezra Jack Keats	Viking 1962	3- 6	SF61-SF61C-Film, Filmstrip	Western Woods
Strawberry Girl	Lois Lenski	Lippincott 1946	8-12	Sound Filmstrip (3020)	Miller-Brody Productions
The Tale of Benjamin Bunny	Beatrix Potter	Warne 1904	3- 6	SF69-SF69C-Filmstrip	Western Woods
The Tale of Peter Rabbit	Beatrix Potter	Warne	3- 6	SF33-SF33C-Filmstrip	Western Woods
Tales from Grimm	Wanda Gag	Coward-McCann 1947	9-12	Film, Filmstrip	Western Woods
The Three Billy Goats Gruff	P.C. Asbjornsen & J.E. Moe, illus. by Marcia Brown	Harcourt 1957	4- 8	Filmstrip	Western Woods
Umbrella	Taro Yashima	Viking 1958	4- 7	SF105-105C-Filmstrip	Western Woods
The Wheel on the School	Meindert De Jong	Harper & Row 1954	9-12	Sound Filmstrip (3001)	Miller-Brody Productions

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